

When I first arrived in Plainfield in April, she trotted to the nearby pond every morning to bathe. She visited us barefoot in sandals in Germany in January, 1991, then on she went to Africa, which Hammy had always refrained from visiting because of the heat. Hammy was of more even temperament altogether, but precisely because of his unflappable personality he was no less lovable.

Perfectly composed, Hammy showed me how to band a bird—demonstrating on the dead falcon we had found! That was the extent of my introduction! Within days I was on my way alone through the marsh when I discovered a nestbox that contained my first live bird. Once again high up on the ladder, I quietly dropped the “hole-plugger”—a sponge on a long stick, used to cover the nestbox entrance—thinking I wouldn’t need it. I grasped my first falcon safe in my right hand, and was all set to carry it down the ladder to the bus for banding and weighing. At that moment I spotted a second falcon in the box. Quick as thought I plugged up the nestbox hole with my right elbow. Number two was safe in there, at least. But now the first bird took firm hold of my left hand and so we stood for awhile, swaying atop the ladder—I suppose you could call it a vicious circle. With aplomb worthy of a circus actor I raised one leg and managed to whip off a shoe to plug the hole. During the next days, Fran never tired of repeating the story again and again, while Hammy merely smiled and asked me how many limbs I had.

Such unforeseen situations occurred frequently, so that improvisation was the rule rather than the exception. The frequent wracking of nerves and need to adapt were gladly suffered as a price for independent work. Fran and Hammy had realized, early on, that “spoon-feeding” and control would never have taught the gabboons to act spontaneously and independently in unusual situations—which are always cropping up when one is dealing with animals. With their antithetical methods they achieved dedication to the “own” project and keenness to work. Perhaps only those who have experienced a similar training can appreciate the procedure.

Nevertheless, it wasn’t that the gabboons were left without any possibility of help, and faced with intractable problems. The Hamerstoms were always available to answer questions—except for Fran when she was busy writing one of her books—and of course they expected to be given the most detailed reports on all aspects of the project. There followed comments which ranged from severe criticism to heartfelt praise. Fran and Hammy always volunteered their frank opinion, and expected a high performance in their gabboons. This made the work in Plainfield wonderful, but also wonderfully strenuous!

That the working atmosphere was so open and personal was surely because the gabboons and the Hamerstoms lived together in this beautifully quaint house in Plainfield. It was the life of a family, and friendships developed fast.

Yes, I learned a great deal in Plainfield: to wash up silver cutlery separately from the stainless-steel variety, not to put fork-handles of bone in water; to nap after lunch, to give vegetables not water to mice, to charm an owl into cheerfulness and a thousand other golden “household-rules.”

Above all, however, I learned to act independently and on my own initiative, and I have the firmly rooted knowledge that people work all the more efficiently the more freedom they are given.—**Sabine Strecker, Moosbachstrasse 11, 7801 Buchenbach, Germany.**

WHY ARE YOU REALLY HERE?

There has been a recent flurry of activity in governments and universities to encourage women in science, yet some women were in science long before these special programs. It is this aspect in part we wish to discuss. Neither of us has remained in ecology but both of us are still woman scientists, perhaps in part owing to the Hamerstoms. We both had some interesting discussions, particularly with Fran, about women and their role in biology.

THE GERRARD STORY

“Why are you really here?” This is the question that Fran Hamerstrom asked me when I first met her, over twenty years ago. The question was not new to me, as many who worked in wildlife had asked me this before. The difference this time was that Fran was a woman and the others had all been men. Fran wanted to know what was going on in my life that I had showed up at her Plainfield, Wisconsin farmhouse wanting to know about her mews and about eagles. On the other hand, the men had all wanted to know what ulterior motives I had for being in the field, and they insinuated that I used my interest in wildlife biology in order to find a husband. The question, coming from Fran, was a refreshing change. The question was directed at me as a person, not as a genderized object.

That night Fran and Hammy and I talked about why I was “really there” and their enthusiasm and direction, in addition to caring and thoughtful interest in me, drew me closer to them. The next morning Fran showed me the “kestrel circuit” as we went out and banded young kestrels. That afternoon, she asked me to clean the refrigerator as the dead owl stored within had maggots. It was my first “test” and I was determined that Fran and Hammy would find no reason to judge me less highly than anyone else, male or female. Indeed, after this first test I felt totally accepted, not only as a person, but as a woman in science, one who could “hold her own.”

Over time, I spent many weekends with the Hamerstoms. I never really became a typical Hamerstrom gabboon, but I often shared in the varied and fascinating life at the Hamerstoms. Sometimes I participated in observing in the field, or banding. On any visit there, I may have found another visitor, perhaps a falconer from Europe, or a raptor researcher from some other state. On one visit, I "purged" a tapeworm I had acquired from fish eaten while I was in the field banding bald eagles. I blended in and spent many hours, particularly with Fran, talking about her early years in wildlife biology, with Darlington, Leopold and others.

Fran had very strong ideas about the role of women in science and in relation to men. In the early 1970s Fran was my first role model of a woman who had entered a "man's" field and had succeeded. She awoke in me the dream that I, too, could overcome the sexism rampant in wildlife biology, and achieve what I wanted. Although I subsequently abandoned the professional career of a wildlife biologist, and went on to get a Ph.D. in Community Psychology, Fran has been my touchstone. At many times I have said to myself, as I pursued my own career interests, "What would Fran say or do?" Her work with raptors, her writing, and her ability to overcome, in her own way, the sex-role stereotypes that have oppressed women have been an inspiration for me.

I first visited Fran and Hammy because I really was interested in raptors. I really was interested in her mews. I really was interested in wildlife biology. I really was interested in meeting a human being who would accept me for all of that and nourish me as a person, as a woman in science. In recognizing all that, Fran gave new meaning to the question "Why are you really here?" and for that I will cherish her all my life.

THE SCHMUTZ STORY

I met Fran and Hammy in 1970 through Joe Schmutz, their live-in foreign summer student. Joe brought me home to meet the Hamerstoms when his VW bus broke down and needed towing. Fran and Hammy never quite believed that was why I was there. In any case, a feast was prepared—fondue on the front porch. Fran believed in welcoming people with food and Hammy enjoyed that part of all the company the most I think! Knowing Fran, pleasing Hammy may have been the primary reason she did it.

Within a short time of my arrival I was given my "test." Fran asked if I would feed the owl using part of the raccoon in the refrigerator. I know I passed the test because some twenty years later I still feel welcome when I visit the house on the marsh.

Fran and Hammy believed that couples should understand each other's work, which should also be their passion, and preferably work together. It was a great disappointment to them that I left ecology for genetics after my Master's and thereafter did not go into the field with Joe. Nevertheless I always felt encouraged by them that I too should pursue the aspect of science that was my passion. Hammy and I spent many evenings doing dishes together after one of Fran's delicious meals discussing my work and my aspirations. In his quiet way he always affirmed that he believed in me. He used to say that genetics had too many numbers for his liking but that he admired my tenacity in sticking to them. That was one of the wonderful aspects of the Hamerstoms—their nurturing of young people into science (and art) and their openmindedness even when we chose to diverge from the path they had started us along.

Fran was one of the few female role models I had in those days. All my biology professors were male then and for some years to come. I remember her advice that a woman who worked so closely with men in the field should dress as much like them as she could, with no makeup or frills. Until of course she went to a cocktail party or banquet at a conference with them where she should don her most alluring dress! She also instilled the notion that it would not be easy to be accepted as a woman and that we must try harder. Not that this was right, just that it was. Hearing this from her when I knew she supported my efforts was much easier than experiencing it with no forewarning, I believe.—
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DEAR FRAN

I think that the circumstances of my tenure with the Hamerstoms bears repetition. While a student at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, I had been "booming" twice. Then after 2 yr in graduate school in Minnesota, as I was entering an elevator in St. Paul, I heard Professor Tester say to Professor Marshall, "We need three students to go to the Hamerstoms' this weekend." I piped up, "I'll go, and I can find the other two, too." As a result of this visit, I ended up spending the summer, and 2 yr later found myself trapping Hen Harriers in Orkney with Eddie Balfour.

My reason for recounting all of that goes back to my first one-on-one contact with Hammy. After spending the dusk hours of my first field day at the Hamerstoms' on top of the Kombi alternating between spotting scope and reading in the banding book, I drove back to the house leaving the banding book topside. What a commotion that caused when it became apparent what had happened. I was delegated to tell Hammy with my head hung in shame. His words still echo, "Well you'd *better* find it!" This was not the abusive response I may have deserved, but there was no question